



THE SAINTS OF THE CANON

THE SAINTS OF THE CANON

By:

Monsignor John T. McMahon, M.A., Ph.D.

THE SAINTS OF THE CANON

By Monsignor John T. McMahon, M.A.,
Ph.D.

Within the Canon, the Church mentions by name two lists of saints who were martyred during the first four centuries after the Death of Christ.

Saint Paul assures us that we are “fellow-citizens of the saints,” (Eph.2. 19) and that we can draw upon their immense spiritual credit balance. The saints of the Canon make up for our deficiencies. We, as members of the Communion of Saints, are never alone in offering the Holy Sacrifice. The Canon saints are active in our cause praying the Mass with us and for us.

In human society, the presence of distinguished persons adds dignity to an occasion and makes us more attentive and respectful. Judge then the Mass by those who are present and what they expect from us. On the altar and around it are the angels and the saints with Christ their Head. Let us think of this often to enrich our offering of the Mass.

Some day we hope to meet the Canon saints in heaven. In preparation for that happy meeting let us get to know something about them now and so widen our friendship.

The aim of this little book is to introduce the saints of the Canon by short sketches of their lives and death so when we name them in the Canon we know something about them.

The rubrics in the Mass instruct the celebrant to bow his head to the Missal on mentioning the name of the saint on his feast day. Let us join in that delightful little courtesy and so win the saint’s affection and help. To remind us to do this we should put an asterisk in red ink on the feast day Masses of the Canon saints in our daily missals. Here is a list of the saints of the Canon and their Feast Days.

<u>FEAST DAY</u>	<u>CANON SAINT</u>	<u>FEAST DAY</u>	<u>CANON SAINT</u>
21 January	Saint Agnes	3 May	Saint Alexander I
1 February	Saint Ignatious	2 June	Saint Marcellinus
5 February	Saint Agatha	2 June	Saint Peter
24 February	Saint Matthias	11 June	Saint Barnabas
6 March	Saint Felicitas	24 June	Saint John the Baptist
6 March	Saint Perpetua	26 June	Saints John and Paul
26 April	Saint Cletus	29 June	Saints Peter and Paul
1 May	Saint James the Less	25 July	Saint James the Greater
1 May	Saint Philip		

CHAPTER I

LIST OF MARTYRS FROM THE “COMMUNICANTES”

The third prayer of remembrance before the consecration commemorates by name, Mary, the Queen of Martyrs, the twelve Apostles, and twelve Roman Martyrs.

The twelve Roman Martyrs include 1) the first five papal successors to Saint Peter, 2) **Saint Cyprian** (Bishop of Carthage), 3) **Saint Laurence** (Archdeacon of Rome), and 4) **five** martyred laymen.

There is proportion and symmetry in the arrangement of names. That symmetry could be graphically expressed thus: 1 + 12 + 12.

The twelve Martyrs mentioned are Roman martyrs, with the exception of Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, whose cult was warmly received by the people of Rome ever since his martyrdom at Carthage.

The “Communicantes” honors the Church Triumphant for it adds to the list of names the words, “and of all Thy saints.” In this remembrance in the Canon of the Mass we ask “through the merits and prayers” of this mighty host of God’s saints in Heaven that “we may be defended in all things by the help of Thy protection.”

The “Communicantes” Prayer

“In communion with and venerating the memory

(Mary Heads the list)

“in the first place of the glorious ever Virgin Mary, Mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ;

(Then the Twelve Apostles/Martyrs)

also of Thy blessed Apostles and Martyrs,

“Peter and Paul, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon and Thaddeus,

(Five Popes)

“Linus, Cletus, Clement, Xystus, Cornelius,

(An African Bishop)

“Cyprian, **(Archdeacon of Rome)** “Laurence,

(Five Laymen)

“Chrysogonus, John and Paul, Cosmas and Damian,

(Other Saints in General)

“and of all Thy Saints; by whose merits and prayers grant that we may be defended in all things by the help of Thy protection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.”

LIVES OF THE “COMMUNICANTES” MARTYRS

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

The Blessed Virgin, Queen of Martyrs, heads the list with the title “Mother of God” which was formally bestowed upon her at the general council convoked by Pope Celestine at Ephesus, the city of the Blessed Virgin, in 431, and held in the Cathedral dedicated to her honor. The heresy of Nestorius, who said there were two persons in Christ, divine and human, and that Mary was the mother only of the human, was condemned and the title “Mother of God” was approved. This Pope Celestine sent Saint Patrick to Ireland in 432, the year following Ephesus.

Mary’s name is not mentioned simply as the other names are, but with great dignity. She is the “glorious,” the “ever virgin Mary.” Mary’s name is inseparable from the Sacrifice of Christ. He came first in emptying Himself. Mary comes next for she gave more than Apostles and martyrs, and thus understands the sacrifice of giving. She “stood by the Cross of Jesus,” and great as the sea was then her sorrow. She is justly called the Queen of Martyrs.

Whenever a soul comes to God in Holy Mass he does so in communion with Mary. Let us bring Mary with us whenever we come to Mass. She knows that the more a soul gives itself into His hands, the more perfectly does He work for its sanctity. No one has abandoned herself to Him as Mary has. No one has placed fewer obstacles in the way of His Will than Mary. She knows me far better than I know myself. She knows why I am unwilling to be subject to Him, why I hesitate to surrender myself to Him, and she will help me to beat down the resistance I put in His way. When He sends suffering and crosses to open our hearts to the height and depth and width and length of His Love for us, and we are reluctant to receive them as gifts from Him, Mary will strengthen us with a Mother’s love to accept them.

Never come to Mass without calling upon her in words such as the priest says in the prayers preparing for Mass:

“O Mother of piety! O Mother of Mercy, most blessed Virgin Mary, I, a wretched and unworthy sinner, cling to thee with all the affection of my heart, and I appeal to thy piety, that as thou stood by the Cross of thy Son, so thou wilt assist me, poor sinner that I am, and all the priests who here, and throughout the world, offer the holy sacrifice today so that it may be a worthy and acceptable offering in the sight of the Blessed Trinity.”

(THE TWELVE APOSTLES)

SAINT PETER: JUNE 29TH

First on the list of the twelve apostles is the name of Saint Peter, the first Pope. His name was originally Simon, but was changed to “Peter” when Christ designated him as the “Rock” on which the Church was to be built. “And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Saint Matt. XIV. 18)

Saint Peter was a fisherman, born at Bethsaida, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. From there, while he was casting a net into the water, Our Lord called him to become a fisher of men. Saint Peter is mentioned frequently in the Gospels, and much of his subsequent history is found in the Acts of the Apostles.

We admire his rugged faith when he spoke for his brethren on the occasion of the promise of the Blessed Eucharist: “Then Jesus said to the twelve: Will you also go away? And Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that thou art the Christ the Son of God.” (Saint John VI. 68-70)

A delightful picture of his impetuous love for Christ is painted by Saint John. They were fishing on the Sea of Galilee, when Saint John joyfully exclaimed: “It is the Lord!” Peter hesitated not a moment, but jumped from the boat and swam to the shore, to be the first to greet his Master. There that day on the sands Saint Peter made his threefold profession of love. “Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love thee.” (Saint John XXI. 4-17) Yes, even though he had denied Him, he does not fear to make that open declaration of love for his Master.

Saint Peter lived in Rome for twenty-five years as the first Pope. Under the persecution of Nero he was cast into the Mamertine Prison, where after eight months he was led out to be martyred. On hearing that he was to be crucified, he asked that he might be crucified with his head downwards, for he was not worthy to suffer in the same way as his Divine Master.

His martyrdom is believed to have taken place on the 29th June, in the year 67.

SAINT PAUL: JUNE 29TH

Saint Matthias is omitted because this list was made at Rome, and the preference for Saint Paul is easily understood. Saint Paul, formerly called Saul, was born in the

commercial city of Tarsus, and enjoyed the rights of a Roman citizen. He first appears in the Scriptures as the young man who held the garments of those stoning Saint Stephen to death. (Acts VII.1.9) In Acts, Saint Luke tells us of Saint Paul's missionary journeys, his sufferings and imprisonments, shipwreck and dangers, of his tireless zeal and ceaseless efforts to prove himself an Apostle. It is in his own fourteen Epistles that we glimpse the soul of this ardent lover of Christ.

It is believed that Saint Paul was martyred in Rome on the same day as Saint Peter, and so these two are inseparably united in the liturgy, sharing the same feast day. Saint Paul, being a Roman citizen, did not suffer the ignominious death of the cross. He was beheaded.

"The Tiber on entering Rome," writes an ancient poet, "salutes the basilica of Saint Peter and, on leaving it, that of Saint Paul. Rome is between the two."

The liturgy links Saint Peter, the new Moses, the leader of the new Israel, with Saint Paul, the new Aaron, more eloquent than the first, a vessel of election to bring the grace of Christ to the Gentiles.

SAINT ANDREW: NOVEMBER 30TH

Saint John tells us that Andrew was the first of the disciples to meet Our Lord. Having spent the day with Him, Andrew sought his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus: "He findeth first his brother Simon, and saith to him, 'We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ, and he brought him to Jesus.'" (Saint John I. 41-42)

Both Peter and Andrew received the call to the Apostolate on the same occasion. "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishers). And he saith to them: Come ye after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men. And they immediately, leaving their nets, followed him." (Saint Matt. IV. 18-20)

Saint Andrew is mentioned several times in the Gospels. We find his name among the wedding guests at Cana. When Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes, it is Andrew who pointed out the boy. "One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, saith to him, 'There is a boy here that hath five barley loaves, and two fishes; but what are these among so many?'" (Saint John VI. 8-9)

For this act of consideration he shares with Saint Peter and Saint Paul the honor of being mentioned twice within the Canon. In the prayer, "Deliver us" ("Libera nos") which follows immediately after the Pater Noster we say, "together with Thy blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and Andrew."

Saint Andrew preached the Gospel in Asia Minor, and in Greece, where he suffered martyrdom, being cruelly tortured, and then crucified on a cross of distinctive shape, resembling the letter “X”, which is called Saint Andrew’s cross.

Saint Andrew is patron saint of Scotland. About the year 369 important relics of the saint were brought from Constantinople to Scotland, and there enshrined in a church built on a site where stands the present city of Saint Andrews.

His head was placed by Pope Pius II in the basilica of Saint Peter, his brother.

SAINT JAMES THE GREATER: JULY 25TH

Saint James was the elder brother of Saint John. The two brothers are referred to by Saint Luke as “the sons of Zebedee.” (Saint Luke V. 10)

Their mother, Salome, who was present at the Crucifixion (Saint Mark xv. 40), was a near relative of the Blessed Virgin, possibly a sister. Consequently, these two Apostles were cousins of Our Lord, and, together with Saint Peter, were privileged to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus to life, and the Transfiguration on Mount Thabor. These same three were with Our Lord in the garden during His agony.

Soon after the Ascension, according to ancient tradition, Saint James preached the Gospel in Spain. Saint James was the first to fulfill his pledge to Our Lord. “Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?” (Saint Matt. XX. 22) He was put to death by the sword in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa some ten years after the death of Christ.

His bones, at an early date, were carried to Spain where they rest today at Santiago de Compostella.

Spain goes annually in great national pilgrimages to his shrine.

SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST: DECEMBER 27TH

Saint John is the disciple “whom Jesus loved.” (Saint John XIII. 23) It was he who leant on the bosom of Our Lord at the Last Supper, who stood, next day, beside the Cross on Calvary, and to whose care the dying Savior confided His Mother, “After that, he saith to the disciple, “Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own.” (Saint John XIX. 27) We see him out-distancing Peter in a race to the tomb. “And they both ran together, and that other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher.” (Saint John XX. 4)

But Saint Peter had his victory later. “And when he stooped down, he saw the linen cloths lying, but yet he went not in. Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulcher.” (Saint John XX.5 & 6)

No knocking at the door, no sensitiveness or shyness about that grand old man of the sea, wherever his Master was concerned!

In the year 95 A.D., during the reign of the Emperor Domitian, Saint John was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, but emerged from it unhurt, and lived to an advanced old age at Ephesus. This is celebrated by the Church on May 6th by a special feast, “Saint John before the Latin Gate.” On that holy spot there is a church in his honor in Rome today.

Besides his fourth Gospel and three Epistles he wrote the Apocalypse.

Saint John was unmarried and remained so till his death. To him, a virgin, Christ entrusted His Virgin Mother. As he stood beneath the Cross on Calvary, his sufferings were equal to martyrdom. There also he drank as from a fountain a heavenly knowledge of the Holy Mass. Let us go in imagination to the Mass said by Saint John in the presence of the Blessed Virgin. What an acceptable offering that must have been! What better companions can we have to walk to Mass with us than the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint John who walked the way to Calvary! What better guides can we have to kneel beside us during Mass than Mary and Saint John who stood by the Cross!

SAINT THOMAS: DECEMBER 21ST

We hear much about “doubting Thomas” but look at the valiant and loyal follower of Christ in the following incident, as narrated by Saint John. On hearing of the death of His friend Lazarus, Jesus made known His wish to go to Jerusalem. The disciples remonstrated with Him on the risk he was taking, reminding Him of the recent threats of the Jews. But when Christ said, “Let us go to him,” it was Thomas who then spoke up bravely to the others, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” (Saint John XI. 16) Fitting words for a future martyr!

Research during the past 100 years shows that Saint Thomas preached to the Parthians in the East, where tradition says he baptized the three Magi. Today in Malabar, India, there exist some 400,000 Christians who claim to be descended from converts made by Saint Thomas. They call themselves “Thomas Christians,” and are organized into a province with four dioceses.

It is now accepted that Saint Thomas suffered martyrdom on a hill known today as Saint Thomas' Mount, some miles south of the city of Madras. A suburb of Madras is called San Thome and a fine Cathedral dedicated to Saint Thomas stands there.

Saint Thomas faced the dangers and uncertainties of exile, far from his homeland; so that his doubting words will be forgiven.

It is wonderful to think of Mass being said in India by one of the Apostles. In the Mass of Saint Thomas on December 21st, the Gospel narrates the famous scene which occurred in the upper room after the Lord's Resurrection. Saint Thomas doubted. Only, when Jesus made him put his finger into the wounds, and passing suddenly from incredulity to ardent faith, Saint Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." (Saint John XX. 24-29)

The elevation of the Sacred Host began as an answer to the heresy of Berengarius, who denied the Real Presence. Look up at the Host and say those words of Saint Thomas, "My Lord and my God," for that practice is enriched by Pope Saint Pius X with an indulgence of seven years and seven quarantines and a plenary indulgence once a week on the usual conditions.

SAINT JAMES THE LESS: MAY 1ST

Saint James the Less, also called the "Just" by the Jews and Christians alike in Jerusalem, was a cousin of Our Lord. Saint James' mother, Mary of Cleophas, was a sister of the Blessed Virgin, and stood with Our Lady beneath the Cross. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his Mother, his Mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen." (Saint John XIX. 25.)

Saint James was appointed by Saint Peter as the first bishop of Jerusalem, where he lived for thirty years a life of extraordinary piety and mortification. His energy in preaching Christ crucified awoke the anger of the chief priests, who stood him on the battlements of the Temple and commanded him to denounce Christ. Saint James proclaimed his belief in Christ, and was immediately hurled from the walls of the Temple. As he was still able to rise to his knees, the rabble fell upon him with stones and sticks and a fuller gave him the death blow by hitting him on the head with his mallet (such as was used in dressing cloth). The fuller's mallet is his distinctive sign.

Saint James wrote one epistle. Chapter III of that epistle speaks to us all on the evils of the tongue, a chapter we should read and think about often, for as Saint James says, "If any man does not offend in word, the same is a perfect man." In this epistle also is found

the Scriptural authority for Extreme Unction. “Is there any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” (Ch. IV. 14)

SAINT PHILIP: MAY 1ST

Saint Philip was the fourth of the fishermen of Bethsaida, in Galilee, to follow Our Lord. “On the following day he would go forth into Galilee, and he findeth Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.” (Saint John I. 33-34) He and Saint Andrew were special friends. It was to him that Christ spoke about feeding the multitude. “When Jesus therefore had lifted up his eyes, and seen that a very great multitude cometh to him, he said to Philip, “Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?” (Saint John VI. 5)

And it was his friend, Andrew, who saw the boy with the loaves and fishes and brought him forward. He was a wedding guest at Cana.

During the Last Supper we hear Philip’s supplication. “Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us.” To which Jesus, answering him by name, replied, “So long a time I have been with you, and have you not known me? Philip, he that seeth me, seeth the Father also.” (Saint John XIV. 9)

He preached in Phrygia, and died in Hierapolis, on a cross, stoned to death.

Tradition has it that the daughters of Saint Philip were the first of the holy women to dedicate their lives to God.

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW: AUGUST 24TH

Saint Bartholomew is probably the Nathaniel mentioned in the Gospel, who was led to the Lord by Philip. “Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus, the Son of Joseph of Nazareth.” And Nathaniel said to him, “Can anything of good come from Nazareth?” Philip saith to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him and he said of him, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.”

Nathaniel said to him, “Whence knowest thou me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.”

Nathaniel answered him, and said, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.” (Saint John I 45-49)

Saint Bartholomew had a direct, blunt personality, with no folds or pretences. He asks his questions frankly and when satisfied, he accepts. Tradition tells us that he evangelized parts of the Indies, afterwards going to Armenia, where he was martyred by being first thrown into a fire and then crucified, like Saint Peter, with his head downwards.

SAINT MATTHEW: SEPTEMBER 21ST

Saint Matthew, both Apostle and Evangelist, was a publican or tax-gatherer, whose calling was despised by the Jews, for the publicans were unjust, and worse still, unpatriotic. Matthew must have been an honest man. His immediate response to Our Lord’s call shows him as a generous and determined character. “He saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And leaving all things, he rose up and followed him.” (Saint Luke V. 27.28)

After his conversion he was called Matthew, meaning “the gift of God.” Tradition holds that he preached in Arabia and Ethiopia. It is believed that he was attacked and killed while saying Mass. We cherish that belief and like to picture Saint Matthew going on calmly with his Mass as the much shouting rabble storm the altar.

Today he is the patron saint of Salerno, where his relics are honored in the metropolitan church.

Saint Matthew is represented by an animal with a human face because he commences his Gospel by tracing the human descent of Christ. His object in writing his Gospel is to prove that the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Who is therefore the Messiah.

SAINT SIMON, THE ZEALOT: OCTOBER 28TH

Saint Luke writes of “Simon who is called Zelotes.” (Saint Luke VI. 15)

He is said to have preached in Egypt and also in Persia, where he was cut in two with a sword.

SAINT JUDE OR THADDEUS: OCTOBER 28TH

He wrote an epistle that is addressed to Jewish converts, among whom he had been an Apostle. He followed the Jews in Syria and Mesopotamia. Later he preached in Armenia where he suffered death by being shot with arrows while tied to a cross.

The bones of these two apostles, Saint Simon and Saint Jude, linked together in the liturgy, are honored in Saint Peter's in Rome.

This is the record of the Apostles, who not only scattered the seed of the divine word, but labored to bring it to maturity and fructified it with their blood.

Following the Apostles are the first five successors to Saint Peter. Then Cyprian, the martyr/bishop of Carthage in Africa, the only foreigner in this list of Romans, but a .name venerated in Rome. Then, Rome's holy deacon, Laurence, marks the transition to the five lay men.

Let us take them in these groups:

THE FIRST SUCCESSORS TO SAINT PETER (FIVE POPES)

1. SAINT LINUS: SEPTEMBER 23RD

Saint Linus, the immediate successor of Saint Peter, was Pope for twelve years. He was an Italian convert of Saint Peter, born in Volterra, an ancient city of Tuscany, and was consecrated an auxiliary bishop to Saint Peter. Under the Emperor Claudius all Jews were banished from Rome in 49 A.D. Saint Linus, who was an Italian and therefore not included in the banishment, ruled the See of Rome until Saint Peter returned. Saint Linus was beheaded by Saturninus the Consul about the year 78. He was buried on the Vatican hill close to the grave of Saint Peter.

2. SAINT CLETUS: APRIL 26TH

Saint Cletus succeeded Saint Linus and became the third Pope. He was martyred about 90 A.D. If the interesting tradition that Cletus was a slave is true, it indicates that the Church's teaching on the spiritual equality of all men, be they bond or free, was put into practice within the first century of her history.

3. SAINT CLEMENT: NOVEMBER 23RD

Saint Clement was the fourth Pope, reigning from 90 to 100 A.D. He is the Clement mentioned by Saint Paul. "And I entreat thee also, my sincere companion, help those women who have labored with me in the Gospel, with Clement, and the rest of my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life." (Philip. IV. 5) Saint Clement's Epistle to the Church of Corinth is an important historical document. Saint Irenaeus writes of Saint Clement, "This man, as he had seen the Apostles and conferred with them, might be said to have the preaching with the Apostles still in his ears and their traditions before his eyes." He was banished by the Emperor Trajan to the Crimea, where his apostolate among the Christian slaves working in the marble quarries merited for him a martyr's crown. An anchor was fastened to his neck and he was cast into the sea. His bones were brought to Rome where they lie today in the basilica of San Clemente, one of Rome's

most interesting churches. There are three distinct buildings one over the other, of which the lowest is believed to be the house where Saint Clement lived. San Clemente is in charge of the Irish Dominicans.

4. SAINT XYSTUS: AUGUST 6TH

Saint Xystus (the Greek form of Sixtus) was a Greek, who became Pope in 257, during the severe persecution of Valerian. Saint Xystus was arrested while preaching in the catacombs and was dragged through the streets of Rome. On the way he met Laurence, one of his deacons, who claimed the right to join his master, but the Pope refused, promising him something much worse, and that promise was fulfilled three days later, when Laurence suffered atrocious torture before death brought relief. Saint Xystus was beheaded in the catacomb of Praetextatus near the Appian Way, where there stands today a very ancient church in his honor. His reign as Pope was a brief one, just a year, for his death occurred in 258 A.D.

5. SAINT CORNELIUS: SEPTEMBER 16TH

Saint Cornelius was a Roman, who became Pope for one year. He was banished from Rome by the Emperor Gallus, and suffered martyrdom under the Emperor Volusian. His pontificate was remarkable for the Roman Council of sixty bishops, which he assembled to examine and condemn the first antipope, Novatian. According to Novatian, those who were weak enough to sacrifice to idols, or to purchase certificates which stated they had done so, during the terror of the persecution, could never be absolved by the Church. Pope Saint Cornelius condemned this harsh doctrine.

ONE AFRICAN BISHOP

SAINT CYPRIAN: SEPTEMBER 16TH

After the five martyred Popes comes an African Bishop, Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. He was of distinguished rank, rich and talented, a man of letters, winning fame in Carthage as a barrister. Converted to Christianity about the year 246, Cyprian distributed his great wealth among the poor, made a vow of perpetual chastity, and devoted his life to prayer and study. Ordained a priest, he was promoted to the See of Carthage, over which he ruled for ten years, from 248 to 258, a period of terrible persecutions. In the public square of Carthage he was put to death by the sword on the same day as his friend, Pope Saint Cornelius, had been six years before. Their joint feast is on September 16th.

Saint Cyprian is one of the noblest characters of Christian antiquity. He was one of the earliest of the great Christian writers to use Latin in his many epistles and treatises. He had a long controversy with Pope Stephen on the question of heretical baptism, whose validity he attacked with arguments which built too confidently on the images he employed. Pope Stephen held by the traditional practice of the Church at Rome. The dispute threatened to lead to a schism when the death of Pope Stephen ended it. It is pleasant to see that Saint Cyprian, in spite of his mistake about heretical baptism, and his long controversy with the Pope, has always been so honored by the Apostolic See, and that he is the one foreigner here among her local saints.

His friendship with Pope Cornelius is apparent in a letter congratulating the Pope on his banishment and foretelling the approaching martyrdom of both of them.

“Let us agree,” he writes, “in remembering each other at this time of peril, and whichever of us shall first be favored by Our Lord with a removal hence, let our affection still persevere before the Lord for our brethren in never-ceasing prayers for them.”

At his execution the valiant Bishop begged twenty-five gold pieces from his friends for his executioner. Walking to the place of execution in Carthage wearing a linen tunic, he bandaged his own eyes, and thanked God for his approaching death.

ONE ARCHDEACON OF ROME

SAINT LAURENCE: AUGUST 10TH

Saint Laurence, believed to be a Spaniard, was ordained deacon by Pope Xystus and made the first of the seven deacons, and therefore the Archdeacon of Rome. His office was the important one of administration of the moneys of the Church.

As Pope Xystus was being dragged through the streets of Rome, Laurence, meeting him, said reproachfully, “Whither goest thou, O Father, without thy son? Whither, O priest of God, without thy deacon?”

And the saintly Pope replied, “I am not forsaking thee, my son, a nobler conflict awaits thee. In three days thou shalt follow me.”

During those three days the Archdeacon hastened through the poorest parts of Rome distributing the goods of the Church to the needy. Arrested by the prefect of the city he was commanded to deliver up the treasures of the Church. Laurence assembled the poor of Rome, and presented them to the prefect as the treasures of the Church. The prefect was enraged at this and determined to pay him back. All through the night Laurence was

tormented. He was scourged, struck with leaden balls, stretched on the rack, burned with hot metal plates. But nothing could break his indomitable spirit. To his tormentors he exclaimed, “For me this night has no darkness, but breaks forth into the bright of day.”

Exasperated, his executioners placed him on a gridiron to roast him slowly over a fire. The saint bore this terrible torture. He even jested, telling his tormentors that one side was sufficiently roasted and they should turn him over. As his flesh sizzled over the fire the martyr prayed, “On the gridiron I have not denied Thee, my God. Over the fire I have confessed Thee, my Savior. Thou hast tried and examined my heart in the night. Thou hast proved me by fire and found no falsehood in me. My soul adhered to Thee, whilst my flesh burned for Thee.”

Saint Laurence is Rome’s proud boast; there his feast-day, on August 10th, has been celebrated since the 4th century.

The Basilica of Saint Laurence Outside the Walls was built by Constantine over his grave. It ranks fifth of the churches of Rome, one of the five basilicas where the Pope alone says Mass on the high-altar, to show his jurisdiction over all.

This ends the list of ecclesiastical martyrs, and now come five laymen.

FIVE MARTYRED LAYMEN

SAINT CHRYSOGONUS: NOVEMBER 24TH

Saint Chrysogonus was a Greek, but spent his life in Rome. There is some evidence that he was the instructor of Saint Anastasia and that he befriended her when persecution struck her. During the reign of Diocletian he was imprisoned for two years and then beheaded. His body was cast into the sea, but was afterwards recovered and buried at Zara in Dalmatia, where his relics are still venerated.

A portion of his head is preserved in the church of Chrysogonus in Rome. He is held in great veneration by the Romans and by the Greeks, who call him “the great martyr.”

SAINT JOHN & SAINT PAUL: JUNE 28TH

John and Paul were brothers. They were distinguished officers in the Roman army during the reign of Julian the Apostate, and were well liked in Rome where they were known as “men of mercy” for their charity. Julian, discovering that they were Christians gave them ten days to retract and offer sacrifice to Jove. The brothers spent the ten days distributing all their goods to the poor, but refused to offer sacrifice. Terentianus, the Roman prefect, had them beheaded in their own home and secretly buried because he

feared the people. He then spread the report that they had been sent into exile. They were martyred on June 26th, in the year 362.

The Roman church of Saints John and Paul, in which their relics lie under the high altar, is said to have been built on the site of their home. The Church of Saints John and Paul is served by the Passionists.

SAINT COSMAS & SAINT DAMIAN: SEPTEMBER 27TH

Cosmas and Damian, brothers from a distinguished family in Arabia, were physicians who never accepted fees and were known in Rome as “the holy moneyless workers” and “the silverless physicians.” Their learning, their skill in healing, and their devout life gained many converts for the Christian religion. They were arrested during the persecution of Diocletian; tortured by fire, water, and the cross; and finally beheaded, probably in the year 287. The great Dominican artist, Fra Angelico, has painted scenes from the lives of these two martyred physicians, which may be seen in Florence.

In their Basilica the mosaics are the richest in Rome. The most ancient monument in their honor is an oratory adjacent to Saint Mary Major, which was dedicated to them in the fifth century by Pope Symmachus.

CHAPTER II

THE “NOBIS QUOQUE PECCATORIBUS” MARTYRS

The second prayer of remembrance after the Consecration commemorates by name fifteen martyrs with the petition that we shall be granted “some part and fellowship with Thy holy Apostles and martyrs.” At the head of the list is Saint John the Baptist, then come seven men and seven women martyrs, whose memory Rome has honored from the early centuries of the Church. Graphically the arrangement of the names might be shown thus 1 + 7 + 7.

The “Nobis Quoque Peccatoribus” Prayer

“And to us sinners also, Thy servants, hoping in the multitude of Thy mercies, vouchsafe to grant some part and fellowship with Thy holy apostles and martyrs:

(First, Saint John the Baptist)

“with John,

(Seven Men Martyrs)

“Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas, Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus, Peter,

(Seven Women Martyrs)

“Felicitas, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia,

and with all Thy saints, into whose company admit us, we beseech Thee not considering our merits but pardoning our offences. Through Christ our Lord.”

Lives of the “Nobis Quoque Peccatoribus” Martyrs

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST: 24TH JUNE AND 29TH AUGUST

Saint John the Baptist was the son of Zachary, a High Priest of the Temple, and of Saint Elizabeth, who was a cousin of Our Lady. (Cf. Luke I. 5-25) At an early age he retired to the desert to prepare himself for his mission as Precursor, that is, forerunner of Christ. He ate no bread, drank no wine, and spent the days in prayer and penance.

In the Advent Masses we see him silhouetted against the Arabian sky, a gaunt ascetic figure in a camel’s skin and leather girdle with staff in hand as he comes from the desert into all Judea, and the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance.

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.” (Luke III. 4)

One of the first incidents of Our Lord’s public life was His baptism by Saint John in the Jordan, when a voice from Heaven proclaimed the divinity of Christ. “This is my

beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Saint Matt. III. 17) John’s mission is now accomplished and the “voice of one crying in the wilderness” is silent. John explains his life as follows. “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom stands by and listens to him speak, and rejoices to hear his voice. The joy is mine in its fullness. He must increase, I must decrease.” (Saint John III. 29-30)

What an inspiring ideal for us all! That He should increase within us, and we ourselves, with all our selfishness and pride, should decrease more and more each year so that there would be more room for Him within our hearts.

Nothing remains for the Baptist except to crown his life with the laurels of martyrdom. Saint Matthew says, “For Herod had apprehended John and bound him, and put him into prison, because of Herodias, his brother’s wife. For John said to him, “It is not lawful for thee to have her.”

And having a mind to put him to death, Herod feared the people; because they esteemed John, a great prophet. But on Herod’s birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before them; and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath, to give her whatsoever she would ask of him. But she being instructed before by her mother, said, “Give me here in a dish the head of John the Baptist.” And the king was struck sad yet, because of his oath, and for them that sat with him at table, he commanded it to be given. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. “And his head was brought in a dish and it was given to the damsel, and she brought it to her mother.” (Saint Matt XIV. 3.11)

June 24th is the feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist and August 29th commemorates his beheading.

SEVEN MEN MARTYRS

SAINT STEPHEN: DECEMBER 26TH

Saint Stephen leads the splendid host of Christian martyrs. He was one of the first seven deacons ordained by the Apostles to administer the funds of the Infant Church among the poor. Saint Luke describes Stephen as, “a man full of faith--full of grace and fortitude and a man who did great wonders and signs among the people.” (Acts VI. 8) But some were jealous of his influence who bribed witnesses to swear falsely against him. Stephen did not temporize even though he felt that the Council was hardening against him. He reviewed the history of the Jewish people and incensed his hearers by accusing the Jews as murderers of the Just One. They rushed at him and in their anger they ran him outside the city, where picking up stones they beat him to death. Stephen continued to pray for those who were stoning him.

“And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul.” (Acts VII. 57)

The grace of Christ for which Stephen prayed with his dying voice made that young man Saint Paul.

SAINT MATTHIAS: FEBRUARY 24TH

Saint Matthias was chosen to fill the place of Judas.

Saint Matthias preached the faith in Cappadocia and around the Caspian Sea. He was beheaded with an axe in Colchis. His head is preserved in the Church of Saint Mary Major in Rome.

The Lord Himself showed that Saint Matthias was the one to be chosen to join the eleven Apostles. (Cf. Epistle of his Mass)

SAINT BARNABAS: JUNE 11TH

Saint Barnabas had the honor of being a member of that band of seventy-two disciples sent out to seek souls. A native of the island of Cyprus, he sold all his land and brought the money and laid it at the feet of the Apostles. (Acts IV. 37) He was elected an Apostle and surnamed Barnabas, which means “the son of consolation,” as a compliment to his gift of speaking. It was Barnabas who led Paul to the Apostles and convinced them of his sincerity. Barnabas accompanied Saint Paul in his missionary journeys and Barnabas’ name is frequently mentioned in the Acts. (Cf. IX, XII, XIII, XIV) He was present at the Council of Jerusalem in 49. (Acts XV. 4)

In his native Cyprus his apostolate was crowned with martyrdom during the reign of Nero. He was buried with a copy of the Gospel of Saint Matthew, which he had copied with his own hand.

SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH: FEBRUARY 1ST

Saint Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch for nearly forty years, was a pupil of the Apostles. Taken captive during the Trajan persecution, orders were given that he be sent immediately to Rome so he would arrive there in time for the wild beast shows. On that journey to Rome he wrote seven letters that are highly prized. The Christians flocked around this grand old man, turning his journey into a triumphal progress.

At Rome the Christians knew of his coming and plans were made to rescue him before he reached the city. Ignatius heard of this and wrote to them pleading to let things be. Here are some of the glorious words he wrote to the Christians in Rome. (He wrote them at night while his jailers slept. He wrote them while he knew that every day he was drawing

nearer to the arena where the wild beasts awaited him.) “If you keep silence about me, I shall become a word of God, but if you love my flesh too much I shall again be a mere sound. Only allow me to be offered as a libation to God while the altar is still prepared. I am God’s wheat and am to be ground by the beasts’ teeth to become the spotless bread of Christ.” (These words form the Communion in the proper of the Mass for Saint Ignatius on February 1st.)

“Agree with me. I know what is good for me. Now I begin to be a disciple. My birthday is at hand. Suffer me to come to the pure light. When I reach it I shall be man indeed. Permit me to imitate the passion of my God. If any man hears Him in himself he surely will understand my desire and sympathize with me. Fleshly love had been crucified in me and there is no longer fire of love for material things, but only a living water that speaks to me within my soul.”

He calls the Blessed Eucharist “the medicine of immortality.” He says, “I desire the bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, and for drink, His Blood, which is incorruptible charity.”

On December 20th in the year 107, the last day of the wild beast shows, Ignatius was thrown to the hungry lions in the Flavian amphitheatre. The animals tore and ate his body so that only the large bones remained. Those bones now wait for “the last day” in the Church of San Clemente, Rome.

What a heroic soul! Everything human in Ignatius of Antioch must have shuddered and shivered at the image of that arena upon which he stood defenseless as the gates were raised to release the growling, savage, hungry animals upon him. Christians everywhere along the route from Antioch to Rome were strengthened by the faith of Ignatius. And what was the source of that heroism? He tells us that it was the Blessed Eucharist.

Whenever we are asked to accept a cross, a sickness, a humiliation, or, perhaps, some failure that hurts our pride, let us come to Mass with this martyred bishop, and seek courage where he found it.

SAINT ALEXANDER: MAY 3RD

Saint Alexander became Pope in the year 109. He made many converts in Rome. In 119, Saint Alexander, with two priest companions, Saint Eventius and Saint Theodulus, was beheaded on the Via Nomentana under the Emperor Hadrian. There is a tradition that he was a son of Saint Felicitas, the heroic mother who was martyred with her seven sons in Rome in the middle of the second century.

His relics and those of his companions now rest in the Church of Saint Sabina in Rome.

Saint Alexander prescribed water to be mixed with wine at Mass on account of the blood and water that flowed from the side of Jesus. Whenever we say the prayer on the mingling of water with wine let us ask Saint Alexander to teach us what it means.

SAINT MARCELLINUS & SAINT PETER: JUNE 2ND

Saint Marcellinus was a priest and Saint Peter was an “exorcist.” That means Saint Peter had received the second of the minor Orders, or steps to the priesthood. They were both arrested. Peter exorcised an evil spirit out of the daughter of the jailer, Artemius, and in gratitude the whole family was converted and baptized by Marcellinus. Hearing this, the judge, Serenus, sent for the saints and commanded them to renounce Christ. On their refusal they were put into separate cells, without light and without food and the floor was strewn with broken glass. But this did not break them so they were led secretly into the Black Forest so their burial place might be hidden from the Christians. They were ordered to dig their own graves, which they cheerfully did, and then they were beheaded. Their relics were discovered by the Christians who gathered up the bones and brought them to the Catacombs. The wooded area was afterwards called the White Forest.

Their bones were moved about from place to place until the Secretary of Charlemagne enshrined them in silver at Selingenstadt in Germany. There they rest today within a magnificent church built in their honor.

They suffered martyrdom under the emperor Diocletian, during the tenth persecution, about the year 303.

SEVEN WOMEN MARTYRS

SAINT FELICITAS & SAINT PERPETUA: MARCH 6TH

These two young women suffered death for their faith in the Amphitheater at Carthage during the fifth persecution of Christians. Septimus Severus was emperor at that time.

Perpetua was of noble birth. Felicitas was a slave and not yet baptized. Both were married. Perpetua had an infant eight months old. Felicitas gave birth to a child while in prison. The father of Perpetua, a wealthy pagan, frequently visited his daughter in prison, promising her everything his wealth could buy if she would only be sensible and sacrifice to the gods. Her reply was to cheer up her prison companions. In the Acts of Saint Perpetua, part of which is autobiographical and part is written by an eye-witness, we have detailed accounts of the prison life and of the martyrdom.

Perpetua and Felicitas, with three companions, were first scourged; then a boar, a bear, and a leopard were set at the men; and a fierce cow at the women. Gored by the wild animals, they gave each other the kiss of peace and were put to the sword. The year was 203.

When the judge told them that they were to be thrown to the wild beasts, Perpetua, Felicitas, and their three companions began to sing with joy, that at such a price were they to purchase heaven. To accept crosses cheerfully and to impose penances joyfully is never easy, but that is the spirit we must seek in our Masses, so we may attain to that “perpetual felicity” that the names of these two saints suggest.

SAINT AGATHA: FEBRUARY 5TH

Two cities of Sicily, Palermo and Catania, contest the honor of her birthplace. She was of noble parentage. Endowed with remarkable beauty, she had to resist the solicitations of the Consul Quintianus, who, unable to attain his end by persuasion, threw her into prison. Her breast was torn by his order, but was healed the following night by the apostle Saint Peter, who appeared to her in prison. In the proper of her Mass, the Communion commemorates that miracle. “I invoke Him the living God, who vouchsafed to cure me of every wound, and to restore my breast to my body.”

The obvious miracle did not impress Quintianus, who could not understand why she continued to remain a Christian, for proud Rome considered the Christians as little better than slaves.

“I am the servant of Christ,” she replied to her disappointed suitor. “The sovereign nobleness is to be the slave of Christ.” He had her body rolled on pieces of broken pottery and on burning coals and, on being brought back to her cell, she died. This happened at Catania, in 251, during the seventh persecution. Decius was the Roman Emperor.

One year after her death, the neighboring volcano, Mount Etna, erupted and a river of burning lava moved towards Catania. Rushing to her tomb, the people of Catania seized her virginal veil, which was not burned but only crimsoned by the fire which had caused her death, and holding it up before the oncoming stream, changed its course to the ocean and the city was saved. This happened on February 5th, her feast day.

Let us invoke Saint Agatha to preserve our homes from fire and to extinguish within our bodies the impure flames of sensuality.

SAINT LUCY: DECEMBER 13TH.

Saint Lucy was born at Syracuse, in Sicily, of wealthy parents. Her mother became ill and Saint Lucy made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Agatha, who had lived in Sicily fifty-two years before her. Her mother was cured. In gratitude St Lucy sold her ornaments, her personal property, and distributed the proceeds among the poor.

During the tenth persecution she was imprisoned as a Christian. Commanded to offer sacrifice to the gods, she refused, saying to her judge, Paschasius, "Pure hearts are the temples of the Holy Ghost." Her accusers tried to drag her to a house of ill-fame, but she was rooted to the ground like a pillar, and they failed.

In the Gradual of her Mass we pray, "Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness." The "oil" gave Saint Lucy suppleness and strength of soul which enabled her to face death rather than yield the treasure of her virginity.

Tradition says that her eyes were put out by her torturers before her death. The name, Lucy, means light, and it is probably on this account that her intercession is invoked by those with eye trouble.

She was martyred at Syracuse, in Sicily, about the year 304 during the reign of Diocletian as Roman Emperor.

SAINT AGNES: JANUARY 21ST.

Saint Agnes, a singularly beautiful character, was a daughter of one of Rome's noblest families. Her hand in marriage was sought by the son of the prefect of Rome. She was imprisoned and her virginity assailed by every means that might shake her resolution. A youth who attempted to do her violence was struck dead, but through her prayers was restored to life. To her many suitors she spoke, "Already hath another Lover taken possession of my heart, who far surpasseth thee in nobility with unrivalled treasures He hath enriched me. His appearance is the most beautiful. His love is the sweetest. The angels serve Him. Sun and moon admire His beauty. By the perfume of virtue that exhales from His person the dead are awakened. By His touch the sick are healed. He hath prepared for me His bridal chamber where music and song resound. For Him I preserve fidelity. To Him I give myself entirely and without reserve."

Saint Agnes is a special patroness of holy purity. To the present day, so great is the reverence of her name in Rome, that maidens cherish her example as if she were still dwelling among them. The name Agnes means "chaste" in Greek and "lamb" in Latin. "She went to her place of execution," writes Saint Ambrose of her, "more gladly than others to their wedding feast."

At the age of thirteen, about the year 304, this youthful martyr suffered torture and was beheaded. The executioner hesitated to bring his axe down on so young and so beautiful a head. Agnes encouraged him, saying, "Strike without fear for the bride does her spouse an injury if she makes him wait."

Over her tomb, in the Via Nomentana, is one of the best known of Roman basilicas, Saint Agnes Outside the Walls. There on January 21st each year during the singing of the Agnus Dei at High Mass, two white lambs are placed upon the altar to be blessed by the Abbot General of the Canons Regular of Lateran. They are then brought to the Vatican where the Pope blesses them again. They are handed over to the Benedictine nuns attached to the basilica of Saint Agnes who rear them till Good Friday and weave from their wool the pallium, the insignia of an Archbishop. Archbishops, on more solemn occasions, wear around their necks this narrow band of white wool in remembrance of the youthful saint who was deemed worthy to imitate the innocent Lamb of God.

SAINT CECILIA: NOVEMBER 22ND

Cecilia was born at Rome of the illustrious family of the Coecilii. As a child she consecrated her virginity to God. Forced by her parents to marry Valerian, a pagan youth, she said to him on their wedding day, "Valerian, I am placed under the guardianship of an angel who protects my virginity." She pleaded with him so successfully that Valerian promised to become a Christian, if he were allowed to see this angel. Cecilia assured him that this was impossible unless he was first baptized and sent him to Pope Urban, who lived hidden in the Catacombs on account of the persecutions. Urban baptized him. On his return he saw an angel brilliant with a bright light standing beside Cecilia. Doubtful whether he saw correctly, he sent for his brother, Tiburtius, who also saw the heavenly visitor. He also was baptized. Shortly after this Valerian and Tiburtius were denounced as Christians and put to death.

Almachius, the prefect of Rome, arrested Cecilia and, hoping to make an example of this daughter of a senatorial family, ordered her to be suffocated in the Roman bath in her own home. Although the baths were specially heated she came through the terrible ordeal unharmed, singing right through the night and day the praises of the Lord. The prefect sent the executioner who struck her three times and failed to sever the head from her body. Cecilia lived three days, during which the Christians came out of their hiding-places to visit her, while she sang and prayed with them in sheer delight, giving them great consolation and new courage. She ordered that her magnificent mansion should serve as a Church. On the third day she died in her own home. The probable date of her death was about the year 117, during the persecution under Marcus Aurelius. She died in a reclining posture, and thus was laid in a cypress coffin which the faithful buried in the catacombs of Saint Callistus.

In 1599 her body was discovered, just as it was at her death, in a state of perfect preservation. The people of Rome were permitted to come in crowds to venerate the body. Stefano Maderno sculptured a reproduction of the reclining body, which is one of the glories of Rome, and may be seen under the High Altar of her Church.

The inscription of the artist reads, "Behold the body of the most holy virgin Cecilia, which I myself saw lying incorrupt in her tomb. I have in this marble expressed for thee the very same saint in the very same posture of body."

Saint Cecilia is the patroness of Church music. In her office the Church says, "To the sound of musical instruments the virgin Cecilia sang to God in her heart." In her "Acts" we read that she sang continuously the praises of God.

What a song of joy the three must have sung as Valerian and Tiburtius, the fruits of her pledging, greeted her soul in Heaven. When we sing during Mass let us remember that Saint Cecilia and her companions are singing with us.

SAINT ANASTASIA: DECEMBER 25TH.

On Christmas day, in the year 304, Anastasia, a widow, was visiting the faithful on an errand of mercy, on the island of Palmaria, when she was captured and put to death during the persecution under Diocletian. While her pagan husband, Publius, lived, she suffered many cruelties. At his death she gave herself to works of mercy. Tradition holds that her tutor in the faith was Saint Chrysogonus, who is mentioned in the first list of martyrs, the "Communicantes" list.

The Mass at dawn on Christmas day was said by the Popes in the very old Church of Saint Anastasia, situated in the centre of Rome in the patrician quarters, and, consequently, the Church of the great court functions.

It is a gracious tribute to her that her name, which means "resurrection," should be commemorated in the second Mass on Christmas day, which is said at dawn in Rome.

Imprimatur:

D. MANNIX, Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.

Nihil Obstat:

PERCY JONES, Diocesan Censor, 5th October, 1958



This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.
8528 Kenosha Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80908-5000

www.servi.org